

FREE ISSUE

INTERVIEW YOKO TARO

PREVIEW HOT WHEELS UNLEASHED



ISSUE 76 JUNE/JULY 2021

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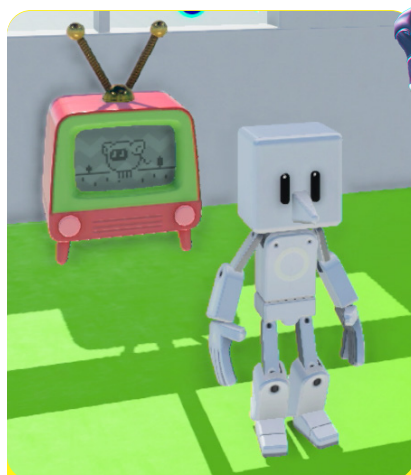
 **PS4**

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FROM THE EDITORS



FOREVER YOUNG

Let's celebrate this issue's cover game, the PlayStation 5 exclusive *Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart*, by mixing a little history with a little math.

If you were born on the day the original *Ratchet & Clank* launched on PlayStation 2, you'd be 18 years old right now. But rare is the newborn infant with the grip strength or problem-solving skills to master a 3D action game, so we should probably add onto that tally. Given that *Ratchet & Clank* launched with a "T for Teen" rating from the ESRB, let's use a person at

If you were born on the day the original *Ratchet & Clank* launched on PlayStation 2, you'd be 18 years old right now.

the bottom end of that age recommendation—13 years old. Today, they'd be 31 or 32. In other words, they'd be old enough to have started a family and passed on their love of gaming to their children.

While it can be easy to get caught up in the idea that video games have grown more mature over the past few decades, it's important to remember that the shift has been about *expanding* the market for games, not just aging it upward. Sure, games like *The Last of Us* may be pushing boundaries with gritty content and adult-

oriented storytelling that would be at home on premium cable—the game actually is being adapted into an HBO series starring Pedro Pascal—but there's still a constant stream of titles for younger players to dive into as well.

That's why this issue includes a special focus on family-friendly games, including a feature on Nintendo's hugely exciting *Game Builder Garage*, which teaches the basics of game design and programming in a fun, accessible format. Also featured are *DC Super Hero Girls*, *My Friend Peppa Pig*, and quite a few more. In our previews, we get an in-depth look at *Hot Wheels Unleashed*, the upcoming racing game inspired by the toy car brand beloved by kids worldwide. And, of course, *Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart* is rated Everyone 10+, so older children can enjoy that adventure too.

In addition to that family-friendly fare, we've also got a preview of *Life Is Strange: True Colors*, a Mature-rated game that uses that label to do something different. Deck Nine's narrative adventure drops the combat-heavy approach of many games to tell an inclusive story with an unusual superpower at its heart: empathy.

Of course, if you're the sort of gaming fan who loves gritty, action-packed, not-so-kid-friendly experiences, we've got you covered too. We review the latest hair-raising *Resident Evil* game and interview Yoko Taro, the mastermind behind the *Nier* series of action RPGs. Finally, as always, our Five to Play includes a diverse selection of new and soon-to-launch games.

So when we say gaming, now more than ever, is a hobby for everyone, we mean it. Whatever your age or your tastes, you'll always find the latest games you'll enjoy in *Walmart Gamecenter*, the magazine that keeps you at the center of all things gaming.

Josh Harmon and Mollie L Patterson
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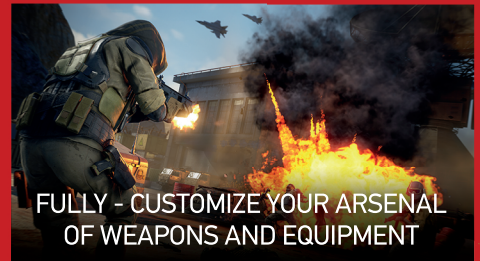
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XBOX REVEALS ENGINES POWERING NEXT-GEN GEARS AND FABLE

Perhaps the most vital aspect of modern game development is the game engine—the collection of technologies and tools that developers use to build and run the content we play. Thanks to two announcements from Microsoft studios, we know a bit more about the engines that will power two big upcoming exclusives on Xbox Series X and S.

First, *Gears of War* developer The Coalition recently confirmed that the studio is transitioning to next-gen development using Unreal Engine 5. Previous games in the series are powered by Unreal 3 and 4, but the latest iteration of the Epic Games-built engine features a number of hefty upgrades designed to take advantage of the power of next-gen consoles.

Most impressively, Unreal Engine 5 removes the need to worry about poly-

counts—the traditional measure of detail in a 3D-rendered scene. Rather than needing to optimize every character, object, and environment, developers on UE5 can instead build the best-looking version of everything, and the engine will dynamically adjust the detail to make sure the scene runs smoothly.

The tech could be huge for the next *Gears*, but don't expect to see it just yet. "Shifting to a new engine is a big undertaking, so we want to be clear that we will not be announcing any new projects or titles for some time," The Coalition said.

Next up is the already-announced *Fable*. The next chapter in the lighthearted and funny RPG series is in development at Playground Games, the same studio that gave us the *Forza Horizon* racing games. In a somewhat unexpected move, however, a new job listing from the studio revealed that *Fable* will be running on a modified version of the ForzaTech engine that powers its earlier work.

Sure, it may seem a bit silly to imagine an RPG running on tech originally built to render a world racing by at 100 mph, but it's less outlandish than it sounds. The *Forza Horizon* games have already shown the engine is capable of delivering detailed open worlds. In fact, given that the *Fable* series is heavily inspired by the UK, all that work Playground put into building out England and Scotland in *Forza Horizon 4* may give it a leg up.

We still don't know when *Fable* or the next *Gears of War* will arrive, but you can always check Walmart.com or your local Walmart store to pick up all the latest Xbox titles.





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**Additional games, systems and/or accessories may be required for multiplayer mode. Games, systems and some accessories sold separately.
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Nintendo

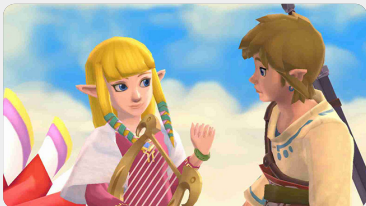


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SQUARE ENIX / XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX
ONE, PS4, PCCAPCOM TAKES A LITTLE HORROR OUT OF
ITS SURVIVAL HORROR JUGGERNAUT

With *Resident Evil Village* now available on PlayStation and Xbox consoles—be sure to check out our review later in the issue—players everywhere are embarking on the harrowing new installment of the survival horror franchise. But while the next chapter of Ethan Winters' story may have plenty of scares, developer Capcom recently revealed that it made a conscious decision to make the game *less* scary.

In an interview with Axios, producer Tsuyoshi Kanda said that, following the launch of *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard*, the team began to receive some unexpected feedback. Not only was the game scary, but some players actually found it “too scary to play.”

“In one regard, that’s exactly what we were striving for, so it’s a huge compliment for us,” Kanda said. “But at the same time, it’s always our goal to create something

that anybody can feel comfortable jumping in and playing, so we eased up on the tension curve [in *Village*] relative to [*RE7*] so that players aren’t in constant fear.”

Still, rest assured that *Village* still has its fair share of creepy moments, jump scares, and unsettling revelations. There’s just a bit more daylight and downtime to help you conquer your fears.

You can nab your own copy of *Resident Evil Village* at Walmart.com or your local Walmart store.

PLAYSTATION ANNOUNCES
DISCORD PARTNERSHIP

The popular app Discord has become a go-to solution for third-party voice chat while gaming on PC, but its dominance may soon extend to PlayStation consoles as well.

Sony Interactive Entertainment has announced an investment in and partnership with Discord, which will lead to greater integration between the two company’s platforms starting early next year.

“Together, our teams are already hard at work connecting Discord with your social and gaming experience on PlayStation Network,” said SIE president and CEO Jim Ryan in a statement. “Our goal is to bring the Discord and PlayStation experiences closer together on console and mobile starting early next year, allowing friends, groups, and communities to hang out, have fun, and communicate more easily while playing games together.”



It’s unclear what features will result from the new partnership, but there are a few possibilities we can think of. The first and most obvious is that your Discord friends will be able to see the PlayStation games you’re playing, just as they can now on PC and Xbox. More tantalizingly, Sony may even enable Discord features like voice chat and screen-sharing directly from your console, allowing you to chat across gaming platforms without leaving your couch. With the rise of cross-platform multiplayer, that would certainly be a helpful addition for many.



PLAYSTATION 5'S DUALSENSE GETS TWO STUNNING NEW LOOKS

Whether you love or hate the black-and-white look of the PlayStation 5, one thing's certainly been missing from Sony's latest console so far: alternate controller colors. During previous generations, the company has offered DualShock gamepads in a veritable rainbow of shades and designs to let you customize your gaming experience—and now the PS5's DualSense is heading down the same road.

"We designed the colors around the theme of 'galaxy' as it felt like a natural progression from the original PS5 and accessories designs."

LEO CARDOSO, SONY HARDWARE DESIGN TEAM

Sony has confirmed two new colorways for the DualSense: Midnight Black and Cosmic Red. Like the default color scheme, these new designs feature a strip of black arcing around the inside of the grips and over the analog sticks, with the new colors highlighted on the outward-facing edge, the touchpad, the buttons, and the D-pad.

To help inspire the new colors, Sony looked to the skies—literally. Cosmic Red drew inspiration from the crimson found in distant galaxies, giving it a richer, almost

burgundy hue. Midnight Black actually features two different shades of black, as well as gray detailing on the buttons, all designed to evoke the depths of space.

A member of Sony's hardware design team, Leo Cardoso, explained the rationale behind the new controllers' space theme. "Our goal is to always find designs that will surprise and entice our fans, and these new colors are the result of an extensive selection process. We wanted the new controller colors to complement each other, as well as the original DualSense wireless controller and PS5 console, so we designed the colors around the theme of 'galaxy' as it felt like a natural progression from the original PS5 and accessories designs," Cardoso said.

"Both Midnight Black and Cosmic Red feature a subtle blue hue that produces unique shades of red and black," added Sony designer Satoshi Aoyagi.

Of course, underneath the makeover, these two controllers sport all the same features as the standard-issue DualSense. You'll be able to feel game worlds in greater detail thanks to advanced haptic feedback, enjoy the dynamic triggers, and use the built-in microphone to communicate with your online teammates.

The two new DualSense controllers arrive in June, so be sure to check Walmart.com or your local Walmart stores for more details.

UBISOFT FINALLY SETTLES AN AGE-OLD DEBATE

Ubisoft recently announced two new titles set in the world of *Tom Clancy's The Division*. The first, *The Division Heartland*, will come to consoles and PC as a free-to-play experience by the end of next year, while the other, still-untitled project is destined for mobile devices. But given the lack of details about either game, arguably the biggest news to come out of the announcement was something else entirely.



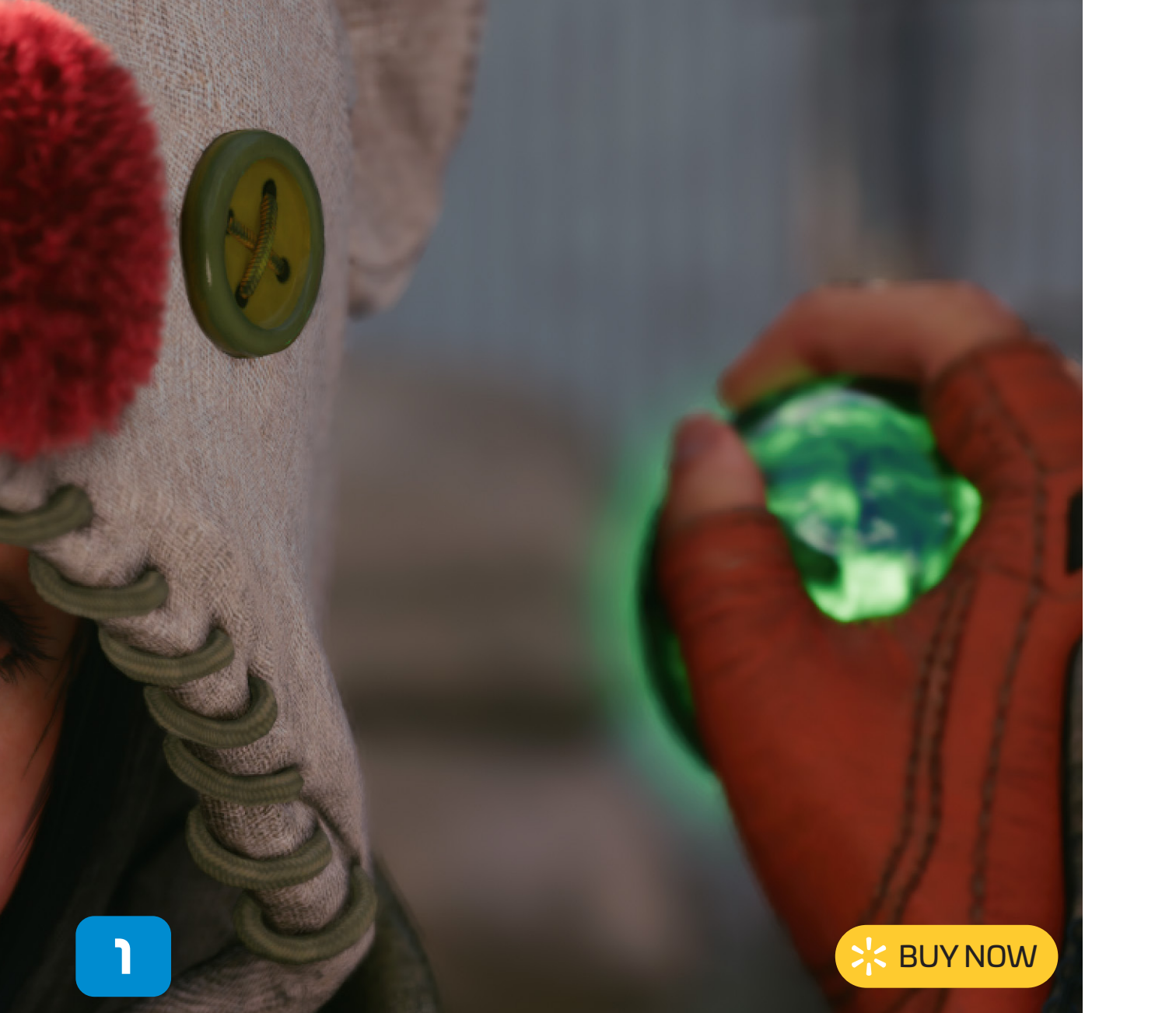
See, the logo for *Heartland* includes new branding, framing it as "A Ubisoft Original." The publisher later confirmed that it'll use this language for all its games from now on, aping how streaming services like Netflix brand their own productions. And the seemingly innocuous change just so happens to solve a long-standing debate about Ubisoft.

It's become something of a running joke that no one knows how to pronounce "Ubisoft." The company even made a video showing its own employees from around the world unable to agree. Is it YOU-BEE-SOFT or OOH-BEE-SOFT? No more. The new branding definitively settles the official English-language pronunciation. If it's "A Ubisoft Original," there has to be a Y sound at the start. Otherwise, it'd have to be "An Ubisoft Original."

It's unclear what impact this massive revelation will have on the broader gaming industry, but in the meantime, you can buy and preorder the latest Youbeesoft games at Walmart.com or your local Walmart store.

5 to play





FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE INTERGRADE

PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX / DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX / PLATFORMS PS5 / RELEASE DATE 06.10.2021

If you're Square Enix, how do you top *Final Fantasy VII Remake*, one of the most impressive and anticipated video game revivals of all time? By giving the game a next-gen upgrade—or, we should say, intergrade. *Final Fantasy VII Remake Intergrade* brings the original release to the PlayStation 5, and the boost in console capability helps power a host of technical upgrades. Now, textures are higher resolution, lighting and fog effects are improved, and performance is optimized with a choice between 4K visuals or a 60 fps frame rate. *Intergrade* isn't just about making the game prettier or faster, however. It also includes the all-new *EPISODE INTERmission*, a chapter of the story that focuses on everyone's favorite Materia-hunting ninja, Yuffie Kisaragi. With Yuffie's introduction happening much later in the original game, her addition marks perhaps the biggest change yet to this updated retelling of the story.

Intergrade isn't just about making the game prettier or faster—it also includes the all-new *EPISODE INTERmission*.



MARIO GOLF SUPER RUSH

PUBLISHER NINTENDO / DEVELOPER CAMELOT SOFTWARE PLANNING / PLATFORMS SWITCH / RELEASE DATE 06.25.2021

With summer in full swing, thoughts naturally turn to warm-weather sports. But since he was dropped by the Mariners five years ago, Mario's reaching for his golf clubs instead of his mitt. In this arcade-style golf game, Mario, Luigi, and the other residents of the Mushroom Kingdom who've paid their greens fees get to once again take to the links. Along with the usual Standard rounds, this also has a story-driven mode in which your Mii joins a country club, takes on Luigi and the gang, and uses that experience to improve their stats. Or, if you're pressed for time, you can play the new Speed Golf mode, in which you and your friends tee off at the same time and do whatever you can to finish first, including using special shots and distractions. You can use the Switch's Joy-Cons as motion controllers, regardless of what mode you're playing.

In this arcade-style golf game, Mario, Luigi, and the other residents of the Mushroom Kingdom who've paid their greens fees get to once again take to the links.

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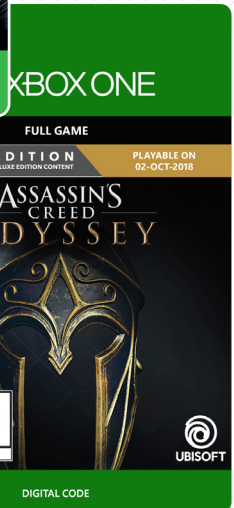
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PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA / DEVELOPER BANDAI NAMCO STUDIOS / PLATFORMS XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC / RELEASE DATE 06.25.2021

"*Scarlet Nexus* takes place in a far future where technology and psychic abilities collide. For hundreds of years, the world has been bombarded by 'Others,' abominations that descended from the heavens and feed on the brains of living creatures. Our story surrounds a team of Other Suppression Force cadets, two of which the player will take control of to discover their story, challenge an array of enemies, and unlock the mysteries of this brainpunk future. As for the gameplay, we like to describe *Scarlet Nexus* as a love letter to the '90s, paying homage to sci-fi anime and JRPGs. Though the real-time combat may appear like an action game—with Yuito favoring close combat while Kasane is a mid-range attacker with heavy focus on agility and dexterity—it is in fact a JRPG with heavy action-RPG elements woven through a deep immersive story-driven narrative."

STEPHEN AKAN, SENIOR GLOBAL BRAND MANAGER, BANDAI NAMCO ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA

"We like to describe *Scarlet Nexus* as a love letter to the '90s, paying homage to sci-fi anime and JRPGs."

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5 to play



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: DARK ALLIANCE

PUBLISHER WIZARDS OF THE COAST / DEVELOPER TUQUE GAMES, WIZARDS STUDIO / PLATFORMS XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC / RELEASE DATE 06.22.2021

Set in the Forgotten Realms, *Dungeons & Dragons: Dark Alliance* is a third-person hack-and-slash action role-playing game that some are considering to be a spiritual successor to 2001's *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* and its sequel, 2004's *Dark Alliance II*. Inspired by the three dozen novels in R.A. Salvatore's *The Legend of Drizzt* series—and set after 1988's *The Crystal Shard*, the first book in *The Icewind Dale* trilogy—the game has Drizzt Do'Urden, Catti-brie, Bruenor, and Wulfgar teaming up to save Icewind Dale when an evil army decides to invade. Playable solo (with you being able to switch between characters) or co-op with up to three friends, and with each of the aforementioned heroes having their own unique and customizable skills, the game has you using real-time combat to take down frost giants, beholders, and, of course, dragons as you struggle to save the realm.

The game has Drizzt Do'Urden, Catti-brie, Bruenor, and Wulfgar teaming up to save Icewind Dale when an evil army decides to invade.

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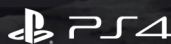
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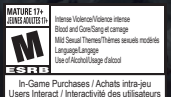


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5 to play



5



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BIOMUTANT

PUBLISHER THQ NORDIC / DEVELOPER EXPERIMENT 101 / PLATFORMS XBOX ONE, PS4, PC / RELEASE DATE 05.25.2021

"*Biomutant* is a third-person, post-apocalyptic, Kung-Fu-fable open-world RPG with a unique free-flow combat system that allows the player to mix and match shooting, melee, and abilities. You embark on an epic journey and decide if you want to save the world or let it burn. While *Biomutant* has drawn inspiration from games such as the *Batman Arkham* series, *Ratchet & Clank*, and *Devil May Cry*, it offers its own kind of experience for the player: A vibrant open world, quirky humor, intense and fast Kung-Fu combat paired with all aspects of a good RPG. We are also telling a story about a post-apocalyptic world where only animals have survived a large environmental catastrophe, but have mutated heavily. Some became intelligent and tried to build a new society in the ruins of the destroyed world. Our story is about one hero, who must stop the Worldeaters... or not. It's up to the player."

STEFAN LJUNGQVIST, ART & CREATIVE DIRECTOR, EXPERIMENT 101

"We are also telling a story about a post-apocalyptic world where only animals have survived a large environmental catastrophe, but have mutated heavily."



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RATCHET & CLANK: RIFT APART

BREAKING THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE

BY MICHAEL COROFF

Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart might represent the biggest challenge in the series' history—not for players, but for the developers at Insomniac Games.

To start with, it's the franchise's first original sequel in more than seven years. Arriving a little over six months after the PlayStation 5's launch, it also marks the quickest *Ratchet & Clank* has ever come to a new console generation. In fact, it's only the fifth game to release as a true PS5 exclusive. Not only does *Rift Apart* need to uphold and advance the legacy of a beloved series, but it also bears special responsibility to help define Sony's new


system. When you're a trailblazer on new hardware, players naturally expect you to set high technical standards—and to deliver experiences that just wouldn't be possible on last gen.

But for Insomniac, the decision to take on that challenge was a no-brainer.

"One, we all love these characters and have so many new stories to tell," creative director Marcus Smith said. "Two, this is a franchise that can push the boundaries of new hardware with its 'anything can happen' sensibilities and focus on explosive weaponry, with visual effects being the other (uncredited) lead character."

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
SONY INTERACTIVE
ENTERTAINMENT
DEVELOPER
INSOMNIAC GAMES
PLATFORMS
PS5
RELEASE DATE
06.11.2020



■ It wouldn't be a *Ratchet & Clank* game without big weapons that spew out even bigger explosions.

"This is a franchise that can push the boundaries of new hardware with its 'anything can happen' sensibilities and focus on explosive weaponry."

MARCUS SMITH, CREATIVE DIRECTOR

But graphical output is not all we're talking about here. Where *Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart* truly shines is in its loading times.

Now, load times might not sound as flashy as 4K graphics and high frame rates, but the way that Insomniac is taking advantage of the PlayStation 5's lightning-fast SSD storage will fundamentally change the way that players experience the game.

"We used to design with large chunks of data in mind," Smith said. "This meant adding 'loading halls' into our level layouts—discrete spaces that only exist to dump the

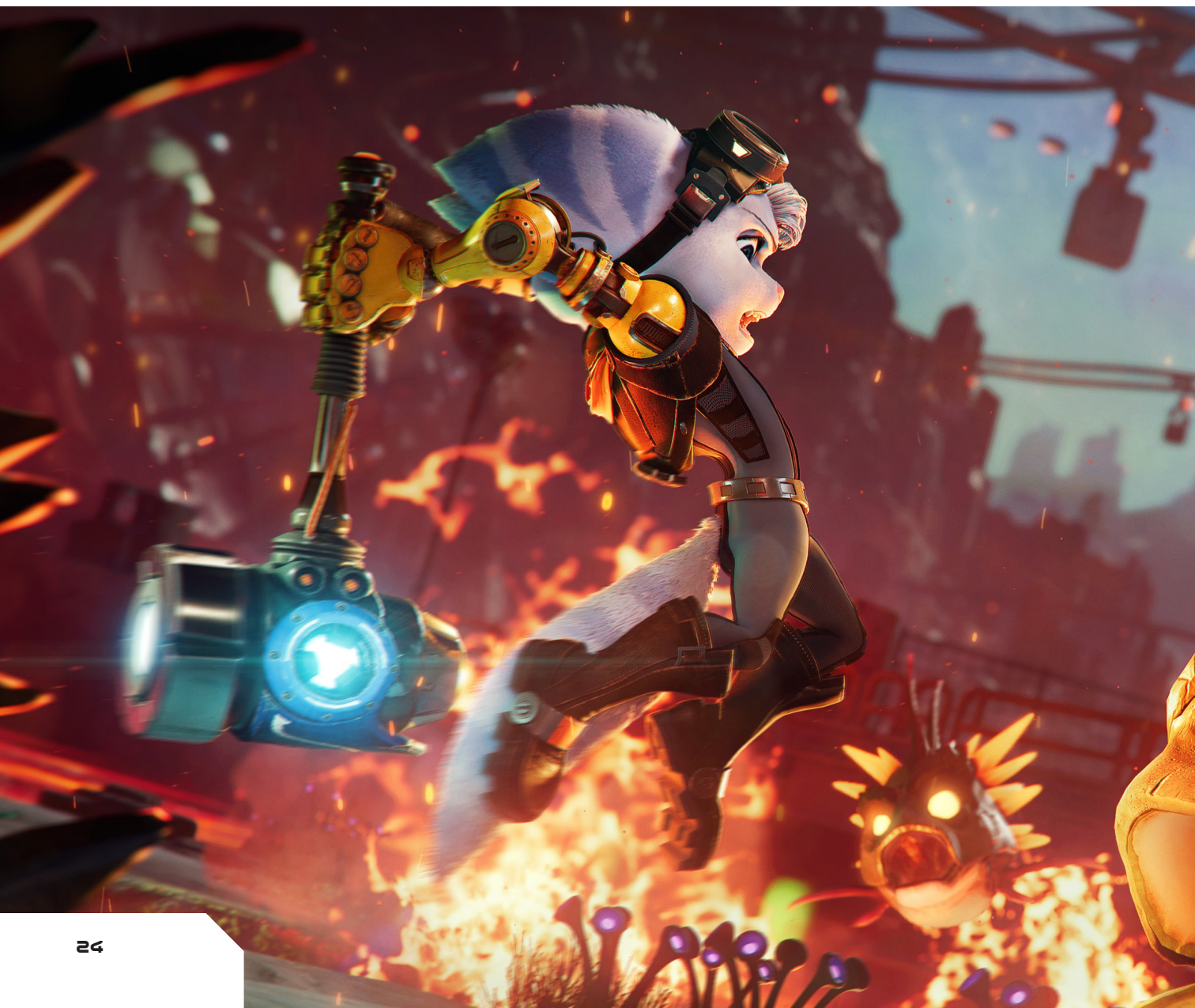
data of an area the player has just left and starting to load the area coming up into memory. Now we're thinking more in terms of constantly streaming, no longer needing to lean so heavily on this approach. We've also proven to ourselves that we can have the world change out from under the player while maintaining interactivity."

Smith pointed to the "shift sequences" that featured heavily in early trailers, when Ratchet and Clank jump instantly and seamlessly between dimensions. But what's even cooler is when players can

■ Rivet, the new playable character, will have access to the same arsenal of weapons and gadgets as Ratchet.

control this interdimensional hopping themselves.

At certain points throughout the game, Ratchet and his alternate-dimension counterpart Rivet (more on her later) will travel to Sync Planets. There, players can switch between two versions of the same planet at the press of a button, thanks to the power of the PS5. And after making the two *Spider-Man* games, Insomniac has more experience with creating open-world environments. *Rift Apart* is still a level-based game, but those levels are bigger than any that have appeared in the series before.





Digitized on PPS

“[RIVET IS] A WAY TO INTRODUCE NEW PLAYERS TO THE FRANCHISE.”

MARCUS SMITH, CREATIVE DIRECTOR



UP YOUR ARSENAL

Ratchet & Clank is known for its inventive weaponry, and *Rift Apart* is no different. Here are some of the awesome new tools of destruction that Ratchet and Rivet have at their disposal:

BURST PISTOL Even Ratchet and Rivet’s base weapon makes use of the DualSense’s Smart Triggers. Half-press the trigger for slower but more accurate fire, or fully press the trigger for a fast-firing but wild burst.

ENFORCER The Enforcer is everyone’s favorite video game weapon—the double-barreled shotgun. A half press fires one barrel, while a full press will fire both barrels at the same time.



RICOCHET The Ricochet fires projectiles that can strike enemies multiple times. If you time each hit right, you can do extra damage.

MR. FUNGI Similar to Mr. Zurkon from previous games, Mr. Fungi is a drone that follows Ratchet and Rivet and attacks and taunts enemies, drawing their fire.

TOPIARY SPRINKLER The Topiary Sprinkler is sure to be a fan favorite. This stationary sprinkler hits enemies with a substance that turns them into sculpted bushes, essentially freezing them. This weapon even works on bosses.

NEGATRON COLLIDER The Negatron Collider is what FPS players call a “skill cannon”—hard to learn but powerful once you master it. Half-pressing the trigger charges the Negatron Collider’s beam rifle. Pressing down will fire, but you can also let go of the trigger to stop charging so you don’t waste a round.

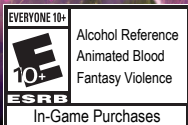
SHATTERBOMB What would a *Ratchet & Clank* game be without a grenade launcher? That’s exactly what the Shatterbomb is. Enough said.

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These cool technical tricks aren't just for show. As we've come to expect from Insomniac, its engineers and designers have worked in step to pair technological advancements with storytelling and gameplay. In that way, *Rift Apart* takes another step forward for the series by intro-

■ The environments in *Rift Apart* are bigger and more detailed than anything the series has seen.

ducing a completely new playable character.

Let's back up for a second. *Rift Apart* starts like any old *Ratchet & Clank* game. Dr. Nefarious is up to no good, and Ratchet and Clank are once again called upon to kick his deranged butt. However, Nefari-

ous has a trick up his sleeve in the form of the Dimensionator, and he uses it to rip holes in the space-time continuum and take over another dimension.

That's where Rivet comes in. She's a Lombax freedom fighter who lives in an alternative version of Mega-



Captured on PS5™



RIFT APART TAKES ANOTHER STEP FORWARD FOR THE SERIES BY INTRODUCING A COMPLETELY NEW PLAYABLE CHARACTER.

Iopolis, called Nefarious City, where the mad doctor is emperor. Through a twist of fate, she meets Clank, and the two team up to take down Nefarious. Meanwhile, Ratchet is trying to find his robot pal and get back to their own dimension.

Throughout their journey, *Rift Apart*'s heroes will travel to the dusty canyons of Torren IV and the sky-scraping plateaus of Savali, just to name a few locations. Each offers unique gameplay moments of its own, as well.

SOUND ON FOR THIS ONE

The PlayStation 5's lightning-fast SSD and its DualSense controllers aren't the only technological advancements that developer Insomniac Games has used to its advantage in *Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart*. One of the areas where the team focused its efforts was making the most of the PS5's 3D audio.

"The way we create sounds in the world is quite different when being done for 3D spatial audio," creative director Marcus Smith said. "Ambisonics allow us to place sound sources in the world that better reflect the way humans' hearing works, and this means players will be much more immersed in our worlds."

What's really cool is how Insomniac has combined the DualSense's haptic feedback with the game's 3D audio, since the PS5 actually allows developers to generate distinctive rumble patterns using sound files as a source. That tech has granted *Rift Apart* a "nuanced fidelity of feel," Smith said. "Working on the PlayStation 5 has made us rethink the player experience and the process of making games."



A RIVET-ING NEW CHARACTER

While Ratchet and Clank's names are in the title, it's the new character—Rivet—who really steals the show in *Rift Apart*.

Rivet is a “freedom fighter” in an alternate dimension where Nefarious is emperor and ruling with an iron fist. Despite all her best efforts, Nefarious is winning. That is, until Ratchet and Clank accidentally wind up in her universe.

Rivet offered Insomniac a new way to explore its long-running franchise, creative director Marcus Smith said.

“We were looking for a way to introduce new players to the franchise,” Smith said, “and one way to do that was to introduce a new, parallel dimension where we would meet an alternate-dimensional version of Ratchet, one who never had a Clank to team-up with. In this way... it's almost like a reboot, albeit a brand-new version.”

But Insomniac hasn't forgotten its longtime fans, as the game includes “plenty of nods and references to older storylines,” Smith said.



Captured on PS5

“Getting around on Torren IV often means commandeering the Vullard's ramshackle equipment and keeping an eye out for the frequently plundering pirates,” game director Mike Daly said. Meanwhile, on Savali, players will find “a skate-park of excavation equipment built around scattered ancient Lombax ruins on top of deep catacombs.”

As an alternate-dimension Ratchet, Rivet plays exactly as you'd expect. Both characters use inventive weapons and explosive gadgets to take down the bad guys. But the Lombaxes have a few new tricks up their sleeves, including a move called the Phantom Dash that lets them dodge out of danger and gain a few frames of invincibility while they're at it.

On top of that, Ratchet and Rivet have a completely new arsenal that takes advantage of the PS5's DualSense controller in a fun way, as some weapons come with two

AS AN ALTERNATE-DIMENSION RATCHET, RIVET PLAYS EXACTLY AS YOU'D EXPECT. BOTH CHARACTERS USE INVENTIVE WEAPONS AND EXPLOSIVE GADGETS TO TAKE DOWN THE BAD GUYS.

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firing modes. You can fully pull the R2 trigger for one firing mode, or just halfway for an alternate firing mode. While these mechanics aren't exactly new, the resistance created by the DualSense's adaptive triggers makes it easy to tell when you're half-pressing or going all the way. It's a cool use of the PS5's peripherals and is just another example of how Insomniac is leveraging the console's new features.

The DualSense's new features don't just add to the gunplay, either. It was important to Insomniac to use the controller to fully immerse players in the world.

"As we explored haptics further, we discovered that they also work great for reinforcing the details of the world," Daly said. "The vibrations have enough fidelity to convey subtle sensations like footsteps without being distracting or intrusive, allowing us to use them to add more life to environments as well."



■ The Rift Tether is one of many new traversal options that make combat more dynamic.

While *Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart* is a showcase for the PS5, it also has everything that makes a great sequel. "There are three essential elements of any *Ratchet & Clank* game: Tell a story with humor and heart, explore exotic new alien worlds, and deliver

an entertaining arsenal the player never expects," Daly said. "Fans can expect a much higher quality bar for everything they love about *Ratchet & Clank* in addition to a slew of characters, planets, weapons, and gadgets they've never seen before." ©

"FANS CAN EXPECT A MUCH HIGHER QUALITY BAR FOR EVERYTHING THEY LOVE ABOUT RATCHET & CLANK."

MIKE DALY, GAME DIRECTOR



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Gone are the days when we worried about video games corrupting the youth of America. Now, thanks to the advent of ESRB ratings and a blossoming industry, it's easy to find games that entertain—and sometimes even educate—kids of all ages with wholesome fun. To help you pick the games your little ones will love, we've assembled a list of some of the latest titles that excite our inner child.

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BY JOSH HARMON

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FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
NINTENDO
DEVELOPER
NINTENDO
PLATFORMS
SWITCH
RELEASE DATE
06.11.2021

Nintendo may be best known as the maker of great games, imaginative consoles, and iconic characters, but it's also a company that consistently proves gaming can be a way to foster creativity. Who could forget Nintendo Labo, which used the Nintendo Switch and cardboard kits to let players build VR goggles and one-of-a-kind immersive experiments? And what about the *Super Mario Maker* series, which let fans design their own courses for the platforming plumber?

Now, Nintendo is taking that creative push a step further with a new Switch title: *Game Builder Garage*. This new platform will allow users to design, program, and share their very own games, all with a kid-friendly approach that makes experimentation easy. While traditional

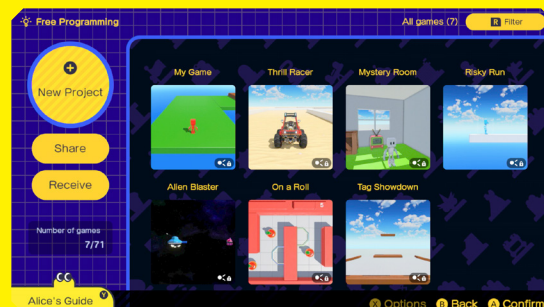
game programming involves typing out long lines of code and frantically checking Stack Overflow when nothing works, *Game Builder Garage* simplifies the process by making programming visual.

Using the Switch's touchscreen, players will place and connect bubbles called Nodon, which have their own faces and personalities. Put down a Stick Nodon and connect it to the right function on a Person Nodon, for instance, and you can make an onscreen character move left or right when you tilt the Switch's analog stick. From there, you can connect a Button Nodon to the jump function, and you've already got the basics of a platformer, all with a simple and characterful drag-and-drop interface. And like the *Super Mario Maker* games, you'll be able to swap be-

tween designing and playing with the touch of a button, making it seamless to test your progress.

To make it even easier to learn, *Game Builder Garage* will include guided lessons created by Ninten-

This new platform will allow users to design, program, and share their very own games.

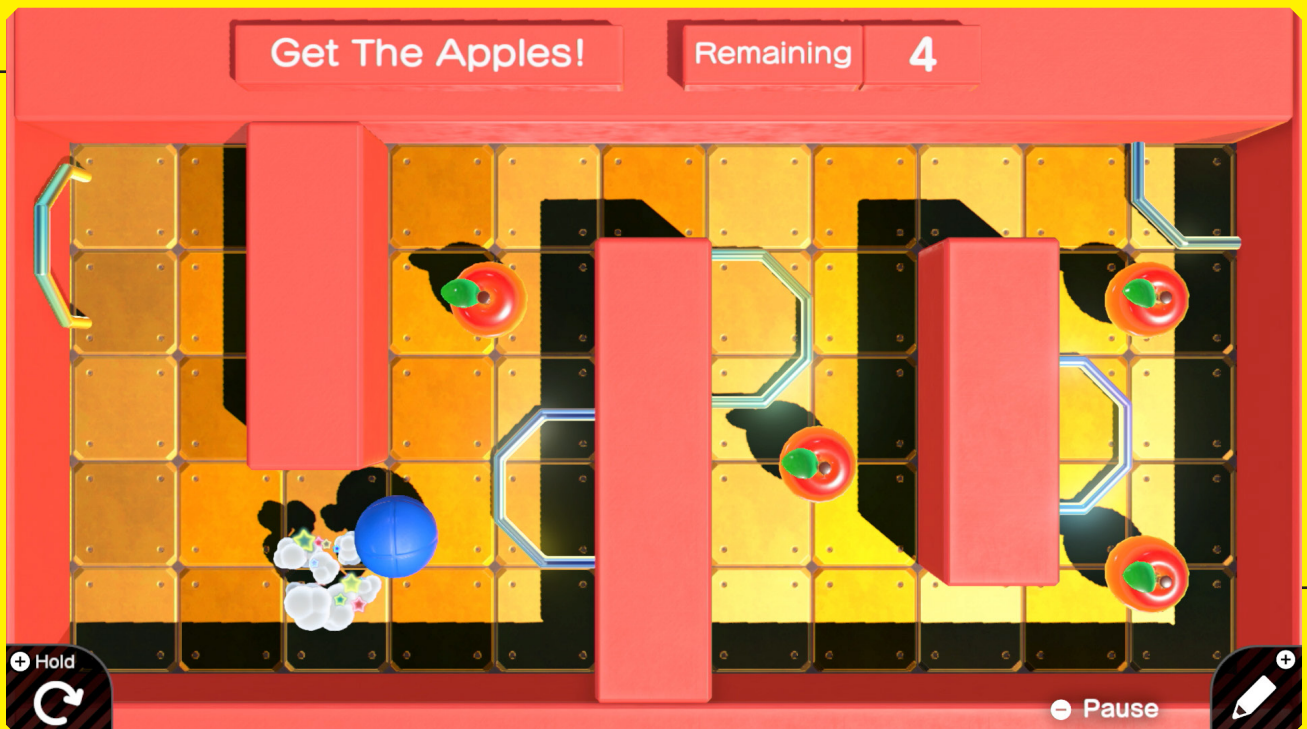
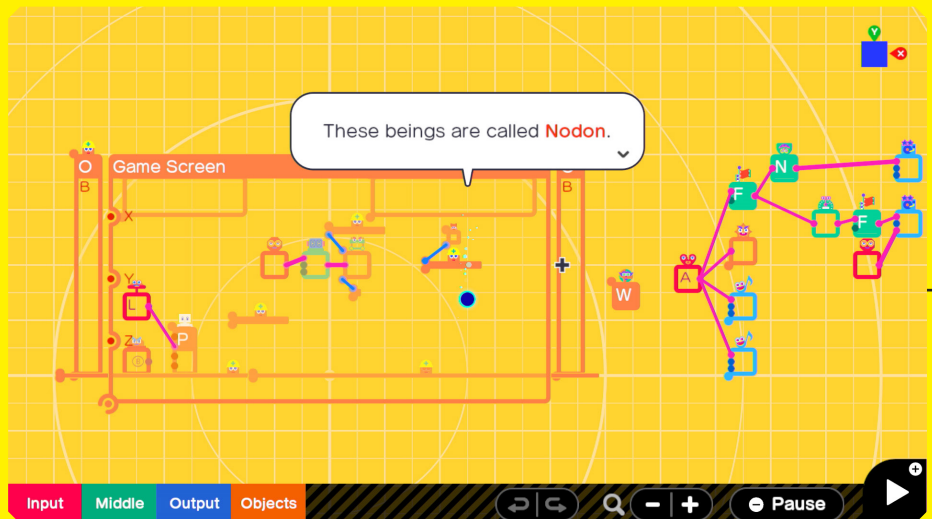
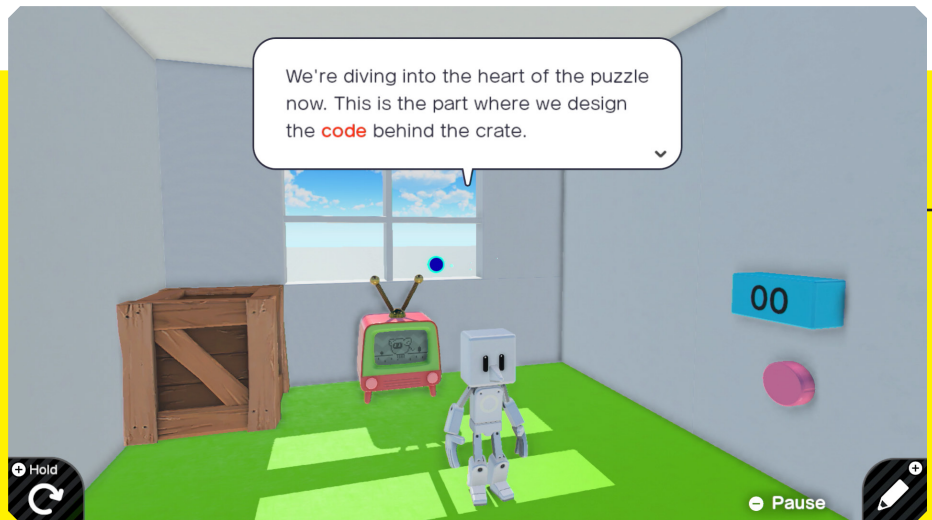


do's own designers, providing some education and guidance on visual programming to those who need it.

While the basics may be simple, the toolkit looks pretty darn robust so far. As part of the announcement, Nintendo offered brief glimpses at a huge number of experiences built in *Game Builder Garage*, and the range of genres included was nothing short of astounding. We saw 2D and 3D games, platformers and fighting games, side-scrolling shoot-'em-ups and puzzle games. (There was even a clip of a bulldozer moving blocks around in a game called *Tuna Cube Factory 2*. Sounds like a serious game of the year contender, if you ask us.)

Once you've built the game of your dreams, you'll be able to share your work with friends and family via a local network connection or the internet. You can even look at the code of the games you download to figure out how they work.

Game Builder Garage looks like an impressive way for armchair game designers of all ages to put their skills to the test, have a ton of fun, and learn some valuable STEM skills in the process.



FAMILY FRIENDLY
Games**MIITOPIA**

Nintendo's charming customizable Miis are back in *Miitopia*, a new adventure for the Nintendo Switch in which you and a team of brave heroes must set off to defeat the dastardly Dark Lord. Of course, given that all of the people in the game are Miis, those heroes can be anyone you create—from family and friends to even famous celebrities or your favorite fictional characters. Give your Miis different jobs as part of your team, battle together against fierce foes, and then take a break to bond with your fellow Miis in a cafe or on the beach. Combining Nintendo's trademark game-play with a wicked sense of humor, *Miitopia* is an adventure role-playing game perfect for anyone who wishes they could be the star of the show.

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
NINTENDO
DEVELOPER
NINTENDO
PLATFORMS
SWITCH
RELEASE DATE
05.21.2021

DC SUPER HERO GIRLS**FACT FILE**

Step into the boots of some of DC's most famous heroines and battle to save Metropolis in *DC Super Hero Girls*. Play as Supergirl, Batgirl, or Wonder Woman as you face off against some of their most famous rivals such as Catwoman, Harley Quinn, and Star Sapphire. Of course, the life of a superhero isn't all about saving the day, so you'll also get the chance to tackle something far more menacing than any villain: being an average teenager! Explore the city, hang out at Metropolis High School, and post photos of your adventures on Superstapost. *DC Super Hero Girls* offers an interesting mixture of exciting action and more relaxing socialization for all would-be superheroes age 10 and up.

PUBLISHER
NINTENDO
DEVELOPER
TOYBOX INC.
PLATFORMS
SWITCH
RELEASE DATE
06.04.2021

THE SISTERS: PARTY OF THE YEAR**FACT FILE**

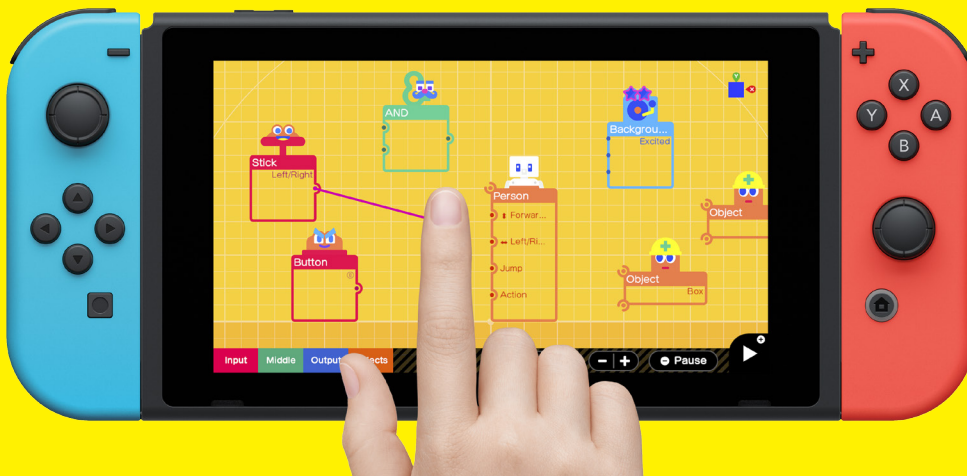
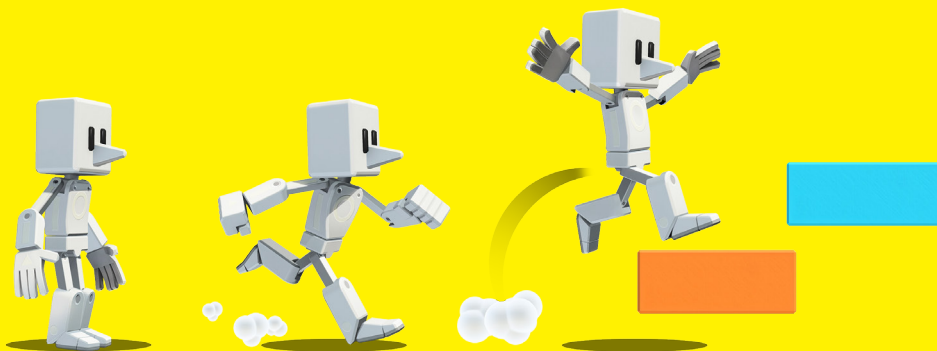
Based on the comic book series by William Murray and Christophe Caze-nove, *The Sisters: Party of the Year* sees siblings Wendy and Maureen battling for control over who gets to plan the big end-of-the-year house party. To find out whose party will reign supreme, the sisters battle it out in a series of crazy challenges to decide an ultimate winner. In addition to an expansive single-player campaign, *The Sisters: Party of the Year* will let up to four players enjoy the various minigames together in either tournament fashion, taking turns picking their favorite challenges, or competing in an "All or Nothing" series of back-to-back competitions. For those who like party games such as the *Mario Party* series, *The Sisters: Party of the Year* promises a way for players of all ages to come together and have fun seeing who's the minigame master.

PUBLISHER
MICROIDS
DEVELOPER
BALIO STUDIO
PLATFORMS
SWITCH, XBOX ONE,
PS4
RELEASE DATE
07.06.2021

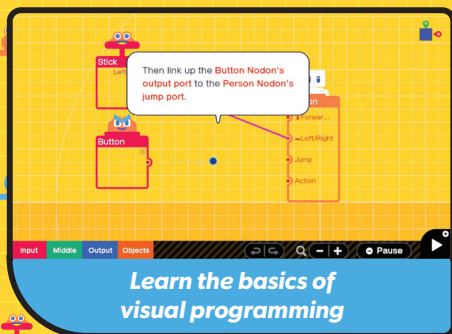


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Nintendo





MY FRIEND PEPPA PIG

My Friend Peppa Pig offers up an original story in which you get to create your own custom character and become Peppa's newest friend. In the sandbox-style adventure, you'll be able to freely explore eight different locations that all come straight from the television show. Speaking of the show, *My Friend Peppa Pig* is being created with a graphical style that directly mimics the beloved animated series, letting kids feel like their characters have stepped into the world of the cartoon. While there, you'll get to explore with Peppa, engage in activities, and meet Peppa's friends and family, all at your own pace. While *My Friend Peppa Pig* will of course appeal to fans of the series, it may also be a great pick for younger players looking for something different and less stressful than other games.

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
OUTRIGHT GAMES
DEVELOPER
PETOON STUDIOS
PLATFORMS
SWITCH, XBOX ONE,
PS4
RELEASE DATE
10.22.2021

THE ADDAMS FAMILY: MANSION MAYHEM



FACT FILE

A mysterious visitor has snuck into the Addams Family mansion with plans to take it over, so it's up to Gomez, Morticia, Wednesday, and Pugsley to save their home. In *The Addams Family: Mansion Mayhem*, four players can join together to conquer the challenges of this new 3D platforming adventure. Based on 2019's *The Addams Family* reboot, each of the four family members brings their own unique special abilities to the game, such as Gomez's Mazurka Saber and Wednesday's pet octopus. You and your teammates will need to solve puzzles, discover secrets, and delve into the depths of the mansion in order to save it from its intruder. *The Addams Family: Mansion Mayhem* looks to offer up a family-friendly way for friends or families to team up and conquer a creepy yet kooky adventure together.

PUBLISHER
OUTRIGHT GAMES
DEVELOPER
PHL COLLECTIVE
PLATFORMS
SWITCH, XBOX ONE,
PS4
RELEASE DATE
09.24.2021

DREAMWORKS SPIRIT: LUCKY'S BIG ADVENTURE



FACT FILE

Based upon the new animated movie *Spirit Untamed*, *DreamWorks Spirit: Lucky's Big Adventure* follows Lucky and her faithful mustang Spirit as they head off on a wild new outing in Miradero. While trying to learn the secrets of Lucky's treasure map, you'll need to outsmart the dastardly horse wrangler Hendricks, discover hidden items, and help the townsfolk of Miradero. Spread out across five different regions, *Lucky's Big Adventure* offers a variety of gameplay types, from exploration, to mystery solving, to horse racing, to even some photography when you want to take things easy. Of course, perhaps nothing is more important to Lucky than her horse, so you'll be able to engage in a variety of options for bonding with Spirit.

PUBLISHER
OUTRIGHT GAMES
DEVELOPER
AHEARTFULOF GAMES
PLATFORMS
SWITCH, XBOX ONE,
PS4
RELEASE DATE
06.01.2021

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preview

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LIFE IS STRANGE: **TRUE COLORS**

SHINING THROUGH

BY MICHAEL GOROFF

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
SQUARE ENIX
DEVELOPER
DECK NINE GAMES
PLATFORMS
XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5,
XBOX ONE, PS4, PC
RELEASE DATE
09.10.21

■ Alex's relationship with her brother Gabe—and the mystery behind his untimely death—drive the story forward.



A lot has changed since *Life is Strange 2* released throughout 2019. Most notably, *Before the Storm* studio Deck Nine took over the series from Dontnod Entertainment. But *True Colors* feels unmistakably like a *Life is Strange* game, right down to the superpowered protagonist—Alex Chen, played by relative newcomer Erika Mori.

Taking place in the fictional town of Haven Springs, Colorado, *Life is Strange: True Colors* follows Alex as she reunites with her brother Gabe after years apart. Tragically, not long after Alex's arrival, Gabe dies in an accident. But Alex senses that

there's more to Gabe's death than the people of Haven Springs are letting on and investigates what really happened.

In order to discover the truth, Alex will have to tap into what she considers her "curse": the ability to absorb and manipulate other people's emotions. At first glance, Alex's supernatural empathy might not seem as flashy as Max Caulfield's time traveling or Daniel Diaz's telekinesis, but Deck Nine narrative director Jonathan Zimmerman said that Alex's powers provided so many interesting possibilities for gameplay and storytelling that the biggest challenge was self-control.

In order to discover the truth, Alex will have to tap into what she considers her "curse": the ability to absorb and manipulate other people's emotions.



■ *True Colors* focuses mostly on characters new to the series, but expect to see familiar faces, too.

"There were never any challenges in figuring out interesting puzzles and dramatic moments for Alex to use her power," Zimmerman said. "Actually, it was really the opposite: How do we keep it contained enough so it always serves the story we want to tell?"

While *True Colors* maintains the series' core DNA, it's also bringing with it several major changes. One of the biggest is that it's foregoing the episodic release schedule and dropping all five of the game's chapters at once.

But *True Colors* also represents a technological leap forward for the series by using full motion capture to bring its characters to life. While

previous *Life is Strange* games used mocap for body movement, *True Colors* also captured facial expressions and voices when filming its actors.

"We sometimes joked that shooting full capture is like making a game and a TV series at the same time. But the results are unbelievable," Zimmerman said. "It definitely makes our jobs a lot easier when we get to use the actors' full range of emotions and trust that everything they perform will come through on screen."

The results will speak for themselves when *Life is Strange: True Colors* launches for Xbox Series X/S, PlayStation 5, Xbox One, PlayStation 4, and PC on Sept. 10.



“We sometimes joked that shooting full capture is like making a game and a TV series at the same time.”

JONATHAN ZIMMERMAN, NARRATIVE DIRECTOR

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Having a supernatural ability isn't the only similarity that Alex shares with previous *Life is Strange* protagonists. Like Max's photography and Sean's drawing, Alex also has a creative outlet: music.

Deck Nine didn't go into *True Colors* with a “mandate” that Alex needed to be an artist, narrative director Jonathan Zimmerman said. Instead, “the idea for Alex to be a musician developed alongside her character” as a way for her to deal with her “curse” of supernatural empathy.

Music plays an important role throughout *True Colors*. Singer-songwriter mxmtoon provides Alex's singing voice and can be heard performing Radiohead's “Creep” in one of the game's trailers. Music from Phoebe Bridgers and Gabrielle Aplin can also be heard on the soundtrack and found in Haven Springs' record shop.

But the music might play an active role in the game, too. In fact, “players will be influencing Alex's musical journey in all sorts of ways,” Zimmerman hinted.



preview

✱ PREORDER

HOT WHEELS UNLEASHED

UNLEASHING YOUR CHILDHOOD

BY MOLLIE L PATTERSON

When searching for a brand to use as the basis for a new racing game perfect for all ages of players, there's perhaps no better choice you could make than Hot Wheels. Since 1968, those classic die-cast toy cars remain loved by children and adults alike around the world. And, when searching for a developer to craft that new Hot Wheels game, there's perhaps no better choice than Milestone.

While the developer is best known for its video game simulations of full-scale, real-world racing, its vast knowledge of so many different fac-

ets of the genre is what makes *Hot Wheels Unleashed* so exciting—not only for us players, but also the team as well.

"The fact that we make high-end simulation games doesn't rule out the chance that we are somehow kids inside," said Michele Caletti, executive producer of *Hot Wheels Unleashed*. "In fact, we are. The team was very excited to work on the game, [as] some of us are longtime Hot Wheels collectors, and we all knew that we needed to readjust to make the game appealing to a broader audience."

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
MILESTONE S.R.L.
DEVELOPER
MILESTONE S.R.L.
PLATFORMS
XBOX SERIES X/S,
PS5, SWITCH, XBOX
ONE, PS4, PC
RELEASE DATE
09.30.2021

■ The cars may be smaller, but players can still expect plenty of full-size racing thrills.

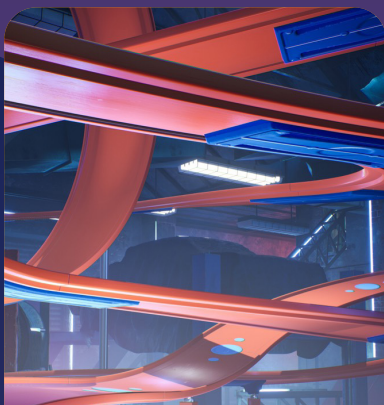


"The fact that we make high-end simulation games doesn't rule out the chance that we are somehow kids inside."

MICHELE CALETTI, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

That readjustment is something Milestone is taking very seriously. Caletti told us that one of the mistakes made with past Hot Wheels games is that they've tried to render the toy cars like real ones. "Instead, we used them as is, as they are, down to the inscriptions on the bottom of the model, sized as a toy into an enormous world," he explained.

Creating that world is one of the areas of development the team seems to certainly be having fun with. While the tracks in *Hot Wheels Unleashed* will all exist within realistic locations—such as in a garage, atop a skyscraper, or amongst the chaos



DEFYING GRAVITY

In all of the design decisions that Milestone is making in the development of *Hot Wheels Unleashed*, one of the areas we were most curious about was physics. When making racing games based around real-world cars, there's a lot of information and statistics you can use to get things just right. When crafting futuristic racing experiences, the sky (and your imagination) is the limit.

Yet what do you do when your cars exist in real life, but they're tiny toys?

Executive producer Michele Caletti told us that the cars in *Hot Wheels Unleashed* will of course have some realistic physics to them, so that they don't "feel so scripted like in some other kart-style games." However, given that these *are* toys speeding around tracks that can get seriously creative, they won't always be obeying real physics either.

"Surely they don't perform like real cars. In their tiny world, they're accelerating like rockets, surviving huge impacts, drifting and boosting spectacularly," said Caletti. "But this isn't how a toy behaves, either! We had to find a winning formula on our own."



of a college campus—those tracks can then offer extreme elements that real cars could never tackle. However, if you ever end up feeling like the team at Milestone didn't go crazy enough with its own creations, you'll be able to use the custom track editor to build even more punishing racetracks.

Of course, no matter the size of your car or the epicness of your course, a racing game isn't a racing game without the thrill of competition. Whether going it alone, playing online, or facing off against friends and family in some local split-screen action, *Hot Wheels Unleashed* will always keep racers challenged around every curve. Just be warned: No mat-

ter how good you get at mastering the game's boost and drift mechanics, special track parts and boss pieces like boulder launchers and giant spiders will always be ready to ruin your run.

Even with all of the larger-than-life elements that Milestone is putting into the game, the most important aspect to *Hot Wheels Unleashed* is that, at its core, it'll be a well-crafted racing game enjoyable by players of all ages.

"We're [not only] aiming for young players, but grown-ups and adults too," Caletti assured us. "It involves lots of choices, from gameplay to graphics, from menu style to artwork. But, I think we succeeded." ☺

■ The game's cars will be able to race upside down on special sections of the track—don't try that with your daily driver.

"We're [not only] aiming for young players, but grown-ups and adults too."

MICHELE CALETTI, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER



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GAME OF THE MONTH

RESIDENT EVIL VILLAGE

IT TAKES A VILLAGE...

BY JOSH HARMON

Resident Evil Village is the eighth main game in Capcom's iconic survival horror series, but in many ways it feels more like the second half of a two-parter. *Resident Evil 7 Biohazard*, released back in 2017, marked something of

a stylistic reboot of the franchise, shifting the action to a first-person perspective and introducing a new hero, everyman Ethan Winters.

Village picks up where the last game left off, both in terms of gameplay and story. Ethan is still recovering

from the trauma he and his wife Mia experienced in the Louisiana swamps, but in an effort to move on the couple has now relocated to Europe with newborn daughter Rose. This idyllic life is violently interrupted, however, when series standby Chris Redfield shows up with a squad of commandos, shoots Mia, and kidnaps Rose.

Ethan soon finds himself stranded in a remote, snowy village, surrounded by werewolves, vampires, and other supernatural beasts. As he tries to rescue Rose and discover Chris' true motivations, he's forced to unravel the village's mysteries—and some big twists that connect back to his own history and the *Resident Evil* canon. Fans of the older games may be satisfied by the return to a more bombastic storytelling style, while

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER

CAPCOM

DEVELOPER

CAPCOM

PLATFORMS

XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5,
XBOX ONE, PS4, PC

RELEASE DATE

05.07.2021





those who loved the simplicity of *Resident Evil 7* may be a bit surprised by just how crazy things get here.

Still, it's clear that Capcom has put a great deal of thought into expanding the last game's first-person combat, and the end result is still quite tense and terrifying. Each of the main areas of the titular village offer slightly different takes on horror,

which lends the game a ton of variety over its dozen-hour playtime.

While the campaign does drag on a bit in the final chapters, *Village* is packed with spooky surprises that will keep you on the edge of your seat. There's a great satisfaction from knowing that, with supplies so scarce and your foes so deadly, each bullet you shoot in a fight can

■ The game's five major villains all have memorable quirks—and environments to match.

be the difference between life and death. Updates like a shop and full economy, and more in-depth crafting and inventory systems, make for a deeper experience requiring more planning and tough decisions, too.

All told, *Village* is a thrilling and chilling new entry in the series—and one that sets up big things for where *Resident Evil* could go from here. [G](#)



Village is packed with spooky surprises that will keep you on the edge of your seat.



1 ON 1

YOKO TARO

PRESIDENT & CEO, BUKKORO

DIRECTOR & WRITER *NIE R REPLICANT ver.1.22474487139...*

With the breakout success of *NieR: Automata*, the game's director and writer, Yoko Taro, found himself with scores of new fans around the world. As players asked for more of his unique take on storytelling, gameplay, and character development, many started looking back to *Automata*'s underappreciated predecessor, *NieR*. Originally released back in 2010, Square Enix tapped Taro and developer Toylogic Inc. to remake the game so that it might get another shot at finding its own success. *NieR Replicant ver.1.22474487139...* brings the original *NieR* into the modern era with higher-resolution visuals, refined gameplay, new content, and the chance to play as the game's original protagonist. Still excited from our playthrough of *NieR Replicant ver.1.22474487139...*, we tracked Yoko Taro down to get his thoughts on the rebirth of his cult classic action RPG. Of course, Yoko Taro being Yoko Taro, his answers are definitely... unique.

WGC: The original *NieR* now has another chance to find worldwide success. How do you think players will embrace the game this time around?

Yoko Taro: That's what they say, but this is an "updated version" of a game, so I don't think it will sell like a brand-new title. The Square Enix marketing team look at me with such sparkling, wantful eyes, as if they're

saying, "This will sell, right?" And so everyday I'm busy trying to poke those eyes with my two fingers.

WGC: This time, instead of playing as Yonah's father, we here in the West get to see the adventure from her brother's eyes. How do you think the difference in characters changes the overall experience?

The Square Enix marketing team look at me with such sparkling, wantful eyes, as if they're saying, "this will sell, right?" And so everyday I'm busy trying to poke those eyes with my two fingers.

GAME HIGHLIGHTS

NIE R: AUTOMATA, SINOALICE, DRAKENGARD 3

YT: It's as dynamic a change in experience as *God of War* changing into *Final Fantasy VII*. That's a lie, of course.

WGC: Can you tell us more about *NieR Replicant ver.1.22474487139...*'s story, and why fans came to love the original as much as they do?

YT: If you'd like to know more about the story details, I believe you can find it if you search on YouTube, so I would check there. As for why fans love it, that may be a good question to ask on some online forums.

WGC: What's something you got to put into *NieR Replicant ver.1.22474487139...* that you either weren't able to do or perhaps didn't think about the first time around?

YT: The new episodes added to this updated version, such as the Mermaid scenario, did not come to fruition in the original because we didn't have the money to do so at the time. So, I'm happy that we were able to implement them. Also, being able to switch the background music in its entirety to that of *NieR: Automata*'s was, how should I say, very economical.

WGC: Another aspect fans loved about *NieR* was its characters. For those players who are coming in new to *NieR Replicant ver.1.22474487139...*, which character are you most excited to have them meet, and why?

YT: This isn't a character, per se, but I would love for people to access the save points. When we released the original *NieR Replicant*, people voiced their disappointment of "How can a game in this day and age still not have auto-save!?" So, I had it implemented as-is, without any change. I would like for people to enjoy this retro game design, where you can save each time.

WGC: How did it feel to go back to the original *NieR* almost 11 years later, and take a fresh look at what you'd help create so many years before?

YT: I figured we could create it more easily, but as I wanted to adjust more and more, it ended up taking some time. Maybe I should have rethought creating an updated version of a past title. I bet our development partner, Toylogic, feels the same way. ©

The background of the advertisement features a close-up, angled view of gaming peripherals. A black SteelSeries headset with a flexible boom microphone is positioned in the upper right. Below it, a portion of a backlit gaming keyboard with green and blue illumination is visible. In the lower right, a black wired gaming mouse with a glowing orange SteelSeries logo and blue light accents is shown. The entire scene is set against a vibrant gradient background transitioning from purple to pink to red.

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